

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ilonka Deaton and I am here not as a legal expert, but as a survivor—someone who has lived through the consequences of an internet that has prioritized profit over protection.

As a child, I was exposed to explicit online content at an age when I was far too young to understand it. Without safeguards, without barriers, I stumbled into a digital world that I was never meant to see. That exposure did more than just steal my innocence—it shaped my self-worth, my relationships, and my understanding of consent in ways that I am still working to heal from today.

Age verification is not censorship—it is common sense. It is the same principle we use when carding at bars, restricting R-rated movies, or keeping explicit magazines out of children's hands in brick-and-mortar stores. Why should the internet—a place that has become more accessible and more dangerous than ever—be exempt?

Critics argue that age verification is a burden on adults. But what about the burden on survivors like me? What about the millions of children who are being groomed, exploited, or conditioned by early exposure to harmful content? This is not hypothetical. It is happening. Right now.

I urge this Committee to consider what is truly at stake. We can debate legal frameworks, but what we cannot debate is the harm that is occurring every day to children who are left unprotected. It is time for lawmakers to stand up—not for corporations, not for the adult industry—but for kids. Because no child should have to give a testimony like mine in ten years.

Thank you.